The Village of Old Beckenham

H. Rob Copeland

A revision and extension

of the original publication

"FROM VILLAGE TO BOROUGH"

(1962)

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1970

"THE VILLAGE OF OLD BECKENHAM"

CORRECTIONS

Page	Paragraph	Line		should read	
Contents		10	Building in the High Street	"	Buildings
1	2	2	were	"	was
13	5	1	Lane	"	Land
18	3	5	Baillif's	"	Bailiff's
23	2	2	the	"	their
27	3	2	back-information	"	back-formation
29	4	1	changes	"	changed
35	1	1	Parth	"	Perth
38	5	1	1877	"	1887
39	3	2	decadel	"	decadal
49	1	2	Two of three	"	Two or three
54	3	8	all	"	many

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INTRODUCTION

Since the publication, in August 1967, of my second notes on Old Beckenham under the title of "THE MANORS OF OLD BECKENHAM", renewed interest has been shown in my original effort "FROM VILLAGE TO BOROUGH" (1962) of which there was a very limited circulation.

As much of the information under the heading of 'The Manor Houses and Estates' in the first book were dealt with more fully in the second, I have not thought it worthwhile to reprint these relevant pages in this publication, but have now revised, and brought up-to-date most of the other original notes, and considerably enlarged the scope of this edition. For clarity and cross reference where information can be found in the second book I have shown the reference thus (M.O.B. p. ..).

As I pointed out in my original Introduction, my grandfather HENRY COPELAND came to Beckenham in 1862 from Sleaford, Lincolnshire, where his father was a butcher, at the age of 20. He obtained work as a carpenter with a firm of builders, Harris and Hooker, in Wickham Road, predecessors of George Green (Beckenham) Ltd.

Among the Old Beckenham records is a photograph taken outside those premises in 1864 in which are Henry Copeland (extreme right) and his brother William.

In 1865 Henry Copeland married a Sleaford girl, the daughter of a mason. Their first home was a cottage in Limes Road and then a cottage next to the forge in Chancery Lane adjoining, where my father, TOM COPELAND, was born in 1869.

In 1874 my grandfather started the business of Builder and Undertaker in the High Street at what was then No.106, the present site of Robertson's. In 1885 the business moved to No.1 The Pavement, Oakhill, the corner shop of a new block built in 1882, now known as 9, Bromley Road.

In 1866 my mother was born at a small grocer's shop near to the Southend Village Pond, and her family moved to No.5, The Pavement where the Family Grocer's shop of FREEMAN was well-known for many years.

Before long a "marriage was arranged" between these two families, and when my father and mother were married they lived, first at Shortlands, then moved to Royton Villas, Bromley Road, near the junction with Wickham Road; and later to 106, Bromley Road where I was born. In 1922 we moved again to 114, Bromley Road, naming the house 'Sleaford'.

With this background, therefore, it was natural that I should take a special interest in the developments in and around Beckenham, having remembered many of the Manor Houses and familiar sights of the Village days.

I gratefully acknowledge permission from the Illustrated London News and Sketch, Ltd. to reproduce the woodcut of the Railway Accident on page 53, and from Geoffrey W. Tookey, Q.C. to use the maps on pages 7 and 16; and I must again acknowledge the wealth of information gleaned from previous publications on Old Beckenham; articles in the local press and by members of the Beckenham Branch of the Historical Association; press cuttings, documents and odd notes from the family of the late Alderman John A. Bennett, the leading historian of 50 years ago.

There is really nothing new in this publication; the material was always there, but the exercise has considerably enriched my own knowledge of local history, and I hope that this effort will encourage others to continue further explorations into the records of Beckenham's past history, and put them into print.

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DERIVATION OF "BECKENHAM"

The long accepted belief that the name of BECKENHAM was derived from the Saxon words 'BECC', a stream and 'HAM', a village or dwelling, has been disproved by recent study of medieval documents, in fact the reverse is now considered the more likely, that the name of the river BECK is derived from the village name of BECKENHAM.

Leading authorities on the subject of place names are convinced that the name comes from the BIOHHAHEMA and BEOHHAHEMA of Saxon times, signifying 'Beohha's settlement or enclosure'. The village is referred to by such names in Charters of the 9th. and 10th centuries.

In the course of years the spelling of the name varied although the pronunciation probably remained much the same. In the Domesday Book the name appears first as BECHEHAM and in a later reference as BACHEHAM, and from these we get the township name of BECCEHAMIAN.

By 1141 the 'ch' was beginning to give way to a 'k' as seen by a reference to BEKAHAM in Queen Matilda's Charter of that year. In later periods many forms of spelling occurred such as BEKENHAM, BECHENHAM, BEGHENHAM, BECKINGHAM and BEKYNHAM; all these variations representing the attempts of scribes to put down on parchment, or paper, the sound of the name of the village when spoken to them.

The present day spelling seems to have been adopted from about the 17th century, although by no means universally, the variation BECKINGHAM still being usual even in the 18th century.

Thus, the following chart shows how some of these changes developed:-

862	... ...	B I O H' H' A H E M A
973	... ...	B E O H H A H A M M E (H E M A)
987	... ...	B E O H H O E M A
1086	... ...	B E C H E H A M
		B A C H E H A M
1100	... ...	B E C C E H A M (E)
1141	... ...	B E K E N H A M
13th. Century	...	B E G H E N H A M
17th. Century	...	B E C K E N H A M

EARLY HISTORY

The changes from a Village of scattered hamlets to a Borough, one of the largest in Kent, is both fascinating and interesting. Beckenham has played its part in the Country's history, and the records in the local Parish Churches reveal the loyalty of the residents throughout the centuries.

Writers of ancient history give little information of Beckenham before the Roman Invasion. Recent excavations at Holwood Park have dated Holwood back to 150 B.C., or even earlier, that is, a century before the first Roman Invasion. Relics of the Bronze and Stone Ages have been found, and no doubt in the far distant ages cave dwellers lived in this area.

Druid worship was still practised here when the Romans came, and the oak groves on Wickham Common are still pointed out as the possible sites of these open-air temples. It has also been established that a Roman Road passed through Beckenham in a direct line from Lower Sydenham, by Worsley Bridge Road, through Langley and on to Titsey. Some of the old bridle paths through the forests are no doubt sites of some of our modern roads.

Traces of a Roman Camp could be seen until recently in the grounds of a house called 'Romanhurst' in Toots Wood Road. This is shown on an Ordnance Map of 1890 as 'Ancient British Earthworks', and is believed to have been a Roman outpost of the Holwood camp. The word 'toot' is of Saxon origin and was used in connection with Tumuli, a look-out hill, or a beacon.

A picture, therefore, of this district in far off ages would be one vast forest with open spaces here and there; a district, well watered by many streams and of many beautiful landscapes. Here wild animals roamed; the wolf, the bear, the boar, the red deer and wild cats. It was also a vast bird sanctuary. Small communities existed in the open spaces, and they sustained themselves by hunting and fishing.

In the Coat of Arms of the former Borough of Beckenham the White Horse reminds us of earlier days. After the Romans left Britain the country was over-run by marauding bands, known as Picts and Scots. Hengist and Horsa (both mean Horse), who commanded the first English who invaded Britain, drove back bands in Kent, and for their victories were given possession of the Isle of Thanet. In the grounds of the Manor House at Swanscombe, Kent the Invicta Memorial bears this inscription:- "Near this spot in the year 1067 by ancient tradition Men of Kent and Kentish Men, carrying boughs on their shoulders and swords in their hands, met the invader William, Duke of Normandy. They offered peace if he would grant them ancient rights and liberties, otherwise war, and that most deadly. Their request was granted, and ever since, the motto of Kent has been "Invicta", meaning Unconquerable.

THE PARISH CHURCH

It is generally supposed that the old Church was built in the reign of Edward III, but it is known that a Church existed on the site before 1100 although no reference is made to a Church there in the Domesday Survey of 1086. The Church Register is among the oldest in the Country, dating back to 1538 when Parish Registers were first ordered to be kept.

On 23rd December 1790 the oak shingled spire of the old church was struck by lightning, and the spire and part of the church were destroyed by fire. In 1864 the main building was restored and enlarged.

The present church was rebuilt from its former structure in four main stages over a period of 18 years, and we are told that during the whole of the work not a single service had to be suspended.

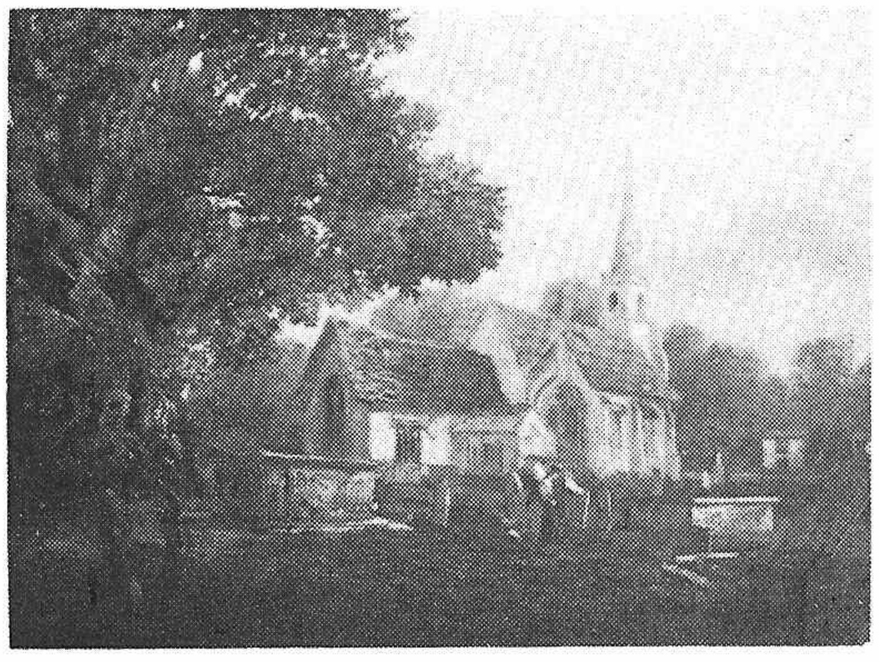
In 1885 the Chancel and Vestry of the old building were demolished for the erection of part only of the new building, which included the North and South Transepts, part of the Nave, the Vestry, Organ Chamber, Chancel and Chapel. This first section was completed in 1886.

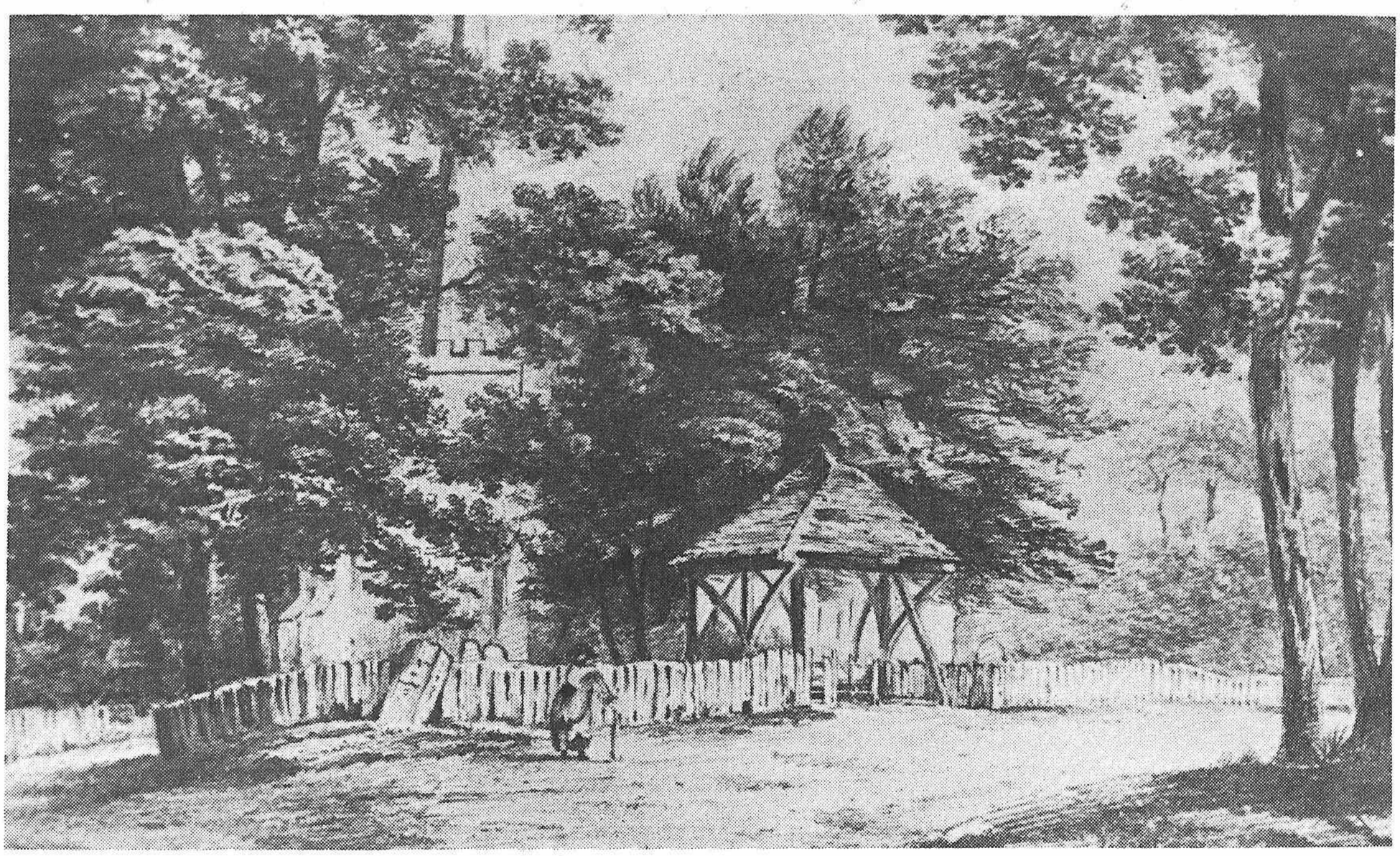
The second stage was carried out in 1887 when the remainder of the Nave, the North and South Aisles, the Porch and part of the Tower were added; and in 1890 the Choir Vestry was built. In 1902 a final effort was made to complete the church by finishing the Tower which was achieved the following year when the 8 bells were recast and rehung, and dedicated by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Two additional bells were added in 1934, the gift of the Beckenham Branch of the Ancient Order of Foresters on the occasion of the celebration of the Centenary of the Society.

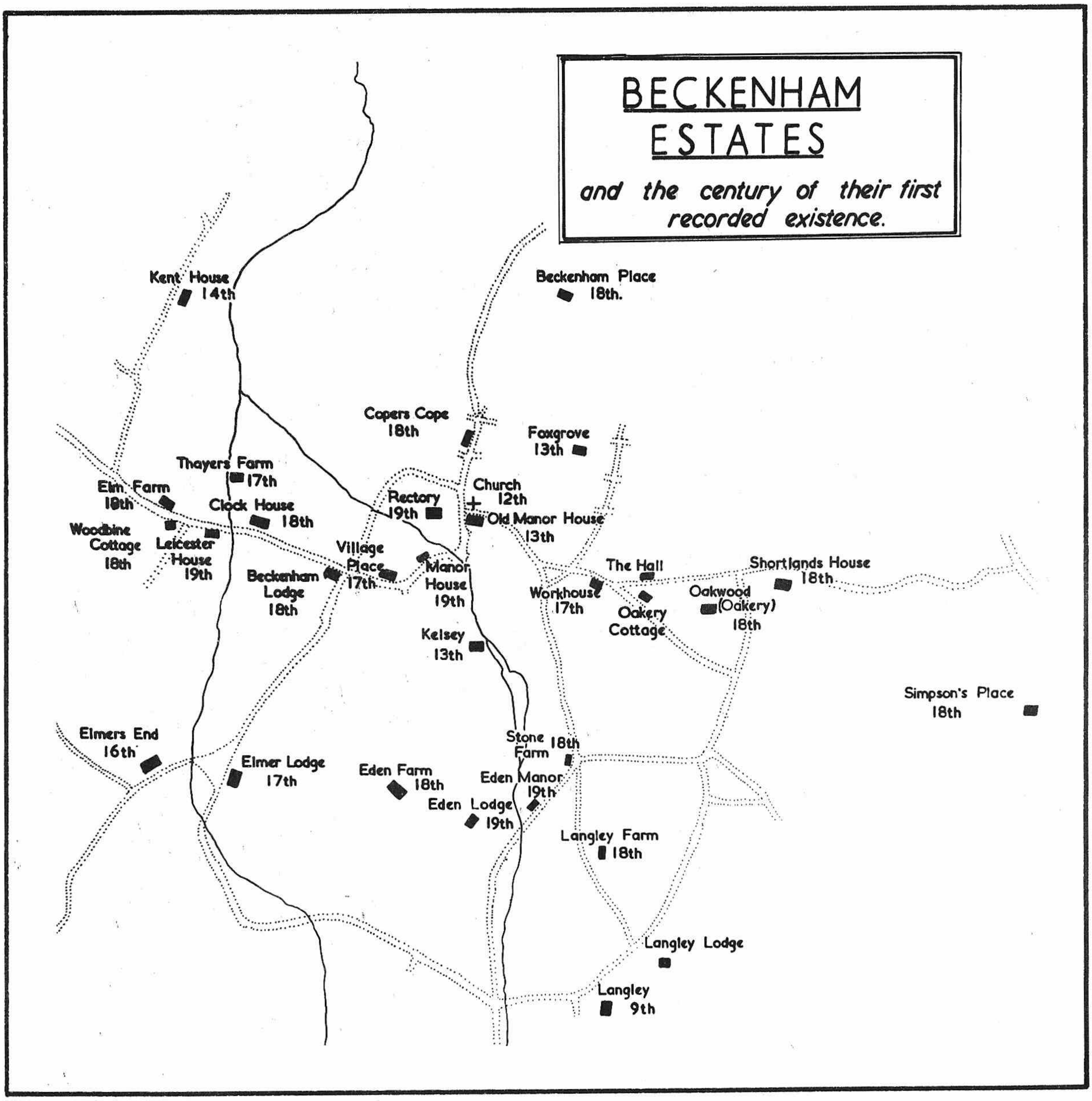
These brief notes are by no means a complete history of such an ancient church, but a look round the tablets inside, and the tombstones in the Churchyard, will recall the families who lived in the Village and whose members are laid to rest within the church precincts.

The Lych (or Lich) Gate is believed to date back to the 13th. century and to be one of the oldest in the Country. It was restored after the first World War by the late Mr.T.W.Thornton in memory of two of his sons who died in that war. Bronze plaques on either side of the main cross beam record the history and restoration of this relic of the old Village days.





OLD BECKENHAM CHURCH


BECKENHAM
ESTATES
and the century of their first recorded existence.
Kent House
14th
Beckenham Place
18th.
Copers Cope
18th
Foxgrove
13th
Thayers Farm
17th
Elm Farm
18th
Clock House
18th
Rectory
19th
Church
12th
Old Manor House
13th
Woodbine
Cottage
18th
Leicester
House
19th
Village
Place
17th
Manor
House
19th
Beckenham
Lodge
18th
The Hall
Shortlands House
18th
Workhouse
17th
Oakery
Cottage
Oakwood
(Oakery)
18th
Kelsey
13th
Simpson's Place
18th
Elmers End
16th
Elmer Lodge
17th
Eden Farm
18th
Stone
Farm
18th
Eden Manor
19th
Eden Lodge
19th
Langley Farm
18th
Langley Lodge
Langley
9th

THE MANOR HOUSES AND ESTATES

As I mentioned in the Introduction, in "The Manors of Old Beckenham" I dealt in detail with the Manors of Beckenham and Foxgrove; the Estates of Langley, Kelsey and Eden Park; the Old Rectory; houses at Shortlands, Oakwood and Elmers End; so these will not be repeated in this revised edition, except that some geographical boundaries are repeated, and passing references will be noted under the heading of 'Road and Place Names'.

BECKENHAM, soon after the battle of Hastings, with a greater part of the County of Kent, was granted by William the Conqueror to his half-brother Odo, Bishop of Bayeux in Normandy and Earl of Kent, who had accompanied him to England. It was described later as a Parish within the Hundred of Bromley, the Lath of Sutton-at-Hone, in the County of Kent.

Early historians recorded, quite erroneously, that Beckenham was divided into four Manors. Beckenham and Foxgrove are authenticated as Manors in various documents, but there is absolutely no justification for now continuing the old legend that Langley and Kelsey were Manors; they never were but were later developed as Estates.

A document dated 1791 would lead us to believe that in the 12th and 13th centuries there were no records of local history, but more recent local historians, having perused hundreds of documents at Maidstone, have provided us with a wealth of material of that period of history.

The MANOR OF BECKENHAM extended on both sides of Bromley Road, from the Parish Church to Wickham Road, along Southend Road and up Stumps Hill to part of Beckenham Place; and on the west side of Beckenham Road and the High Street, taking in the lands of 'Kent House', 'Clock House' and 'Village Place', with the Manor House opposite the Parish Church.

The MANOR OF FOXGROVE was on the east side of Southend Road, beyond the Parish Church, and over the hills of the present Foxgrove Road and The Avenue to the Ravensbourne at Shortlands, with the Manor House at Foxgrove Farm, near the present Foxgrove Avenue.

The LANGLEY ESTATE was an extensive, rambling estate covering an area from Hayes Lane up to Pickhurst and across to Eden Park and Elmers End.

The KELSEY ESTATE occupied the west side of Wickham Road, adjoined Langley and came down to the High Street.

THE HOARE FAMILY

From a close study of 'Burke's Landed Gentry' (1952) and 'Burke's Peerage' (1959) the following information comes to light regarding Sir Frederick Alfred Hoare, Lord Mayor of London in 1962, and the Hoare family at Beckenham.

HENRY HOARE, of Walton, Bucks, a yeoman farmer, the elder son of Henry Hore (or Hoare) died in 1655 leaving, with other issue:-

HENRY HOARE, of the parish of St.Botolphs, Aldersgate, a horse dealer, who in turn died in 1669, leaving an only son:-

SIR RICHARD HOARE, Kt.of Hendon, Middlesex and later of Staplehurst, Kent. He was born in 1648, married in 1672, founded Hoare's Bank in 1673, was Knighted in 1702, became an M.P. in 1710, was a Sheriff of London and was Lord Mayor of London in 1713; he died in 1718. He had, with other issue who died young or unmarried, five sons of whom RICHARD, born 1673, was the eldest and HENRY, born 1677, was the second.

Through the eldest son Richard came the senior line of Hoares - HOARE of ELLISFIELD, Basingstoke, Wilts, Sir Frederick Hoare being the eighthgeneration, through this lineage, of the Sir Richard Hoare, Lord Mayor in 1713.

Through the second son Henry came the Hoare family who lived at Beckenham. He married Jane, daughter of Wm.Benson, Kt. of Bromley, in 1702 and died in 1725. They had two sons, HENRY, born 1705 and RICHARD born 1709.

Sir RICHARD HOARE, as he became, was also Lord Mayor of London, in 1745 and by his second wife Elizabeth had two sons, RICHARD, born 1735 and HENRY, born 1744. Richard became Sir RICHARD HOARE, First BARONET of LUSCOMBE, South Devon who married in 1761 as second wife, Frances Anne, daughter of Richard Acland who had married Ann, daughter of the first Peter Burrell. There is an entry in the Farringdon Diary of 1807 - "Henry Hoare, born 1744, was called 'Fat Harry'. He was a jovial liver and died several years ago (1785). His widow now resides at Beckenham, Kent but has no family".

The first connection with Beckenham is the sale of the Old Manor House to the Hoare family and its occupation by Frances Anne, widow of Sir Richard, First Baronet. The second connection derives from the fact that their youngest son PETER RICHARD HOARE, born 1772, bought the Kelsey Estate in 1835, fuller particulars being given under 'Kelsey' in "The Manors of Old Beckenham" (p.11)

CHARLES A.R.HOARE, the last of the Hoare family at Kelsey, was the fifth generation, through this lineage, of the former Sir Richard Hoare, Lord Mayor in 1713.

CLOCK HOUSE

Strangers to Beckenham, arriving at Clock House Station, invariably ask "Where is the Clock?". The origin of the name appears to have come from a large turret clock which used to be on the stables of a Mansion standing on the site of the present Baths and Technical Institute.

The house was probably built between 1703 and 1723, although there was a reference to a building there on a map dated 1623. It was a substantial, red brick mansion, a familiar landmark on the main road from Beckenham to Penge, and at one time a fine magnolia tree covered the front wall. The property was owned by John Cator.

Sir Piercey Brett, "Admiral of the Blue", who died in 1761, once lived there and in the early part of the 19th century it was the seat of John's brother, Joseph Cator. After his death the occupiers included John Goddard, afterwards of Elmer Lodge; E. Richard Adams, also of Elmers End and for many years Churchwarden of the Parish Church; Sir Francis Tress Barry, who inaugurated the Volunteer Fire Brigade, the last tenant being John Wallace.

The gardens were well wooded and in the lake there stood a two-tier fountain which, on demolition, was placed in the ornamental water in the Croydon Road Recreation Ground.

It was natural that a new station on the Mid-Kent line in 1890 should be called 'Clock House', but six years later the house and most of the stables were pulled down, the clock being moved by the Cator family in 1896 to the stable buildings at Beckenham Place where it is still a familiar sight to visitors to the Golf Course.

For a time the stable remains were occupied by a livery stable keeper and later as part of Horsman's Nursery until finally pulled down in 1926.

Borrowman says "we are told on good authority that there existed in the grounds a spring containing excellent medicinal properties, and we recall the fact that when the well was sunk for the present Baths, the water obtained was pronounced by experts to be of exceptionally good quality".

On the corner of Churchfields Road stood the public house "The Prince Arthur" which was destroyed by a flying bomb in 1944. After the war the rebuilt public house was renamed "The Clock House" with a colourful sign, by a local resident, depicting the original residence of that name.

KENT HOUSE

It is indeed sad to recall that in February 1957 yet another old and historic building of the Village days was demolished - KENT HOUSE, which stood in Kent House Road not far from its junction with Lennard Road - thus breaking the final link of over 700 years.

The building got its name from being close to the County boundary, the first house in Kent coming from the London area.

Beckenham is greatly indebted to historians past and present who, through careful study and research, have recorded so much of our local history. Robert Borrowman, whose pioneer work 'Beckenham Past and Present' was published in 1910, the year of his death at the age of 46, gave us such historical facts as were then available to him.

Members of the Beckenham Branch of the Historical Association, after intensive research in the County Archives, reveal that this house was the oldest house in Kent of which we have definite knowledge; its history has been traced back to 1240 when it was owned by St.Catherine's Hospital.

A document dated 1503 was also found relating to a petition to Henry VIII, following a murder trial, in which John Style, of Langley, was acquitted; the scene of the alleged crime was Kent House.

In the 17th century the Lethieulliers, descendants of Sir John le Thieullier (the name appears to have been altered in the following generations), Sheriff of London, occupied this house.

In 1776 it was sold to Thomas Lucas, of Lee, and in 1784 it passed, through marriage, to John Julius Angerstein, he being a rich merchant of Charlton.

Julius Angerstein was a member of Lloyds in the Coffee House days and initiated the move to the Royal Exchange. An oil painting of him by Lawrence now hangs in the new Lloyds Building in Lime Street, and in the Nelson Room there, are copies of letters between Angerstein and Nelson.

It was while staying with the Lethieulliers in 1694 that Anthony Rawlins, a wealthy London merchant, died and in his will left £50 for the use of the Poor, which sum was used, as Borrowman recalls - "in building a house with three distinct rooms, all under one roof, for the lodging and housing of the poor of this Parish". These are, of course, the Almshouses adjoining the Parish Church which are still administered by the Beckenham Parochial Charity, having been altered and enlarged from time to time.

Thomas Randall, one of the Parish Churchwardens in 1766, and whose name appears on the old treble bell, died there in 1806, after which the property passed to James Randall and was then used as a farm known as Kent House Farm.

In his diary of 13th December 1665 Samuel Pepys refers to the Lethieullier family, and it may well be that he, being a friend, visited them at Kent House.

Thackeray certainly was a visitor and it has been conjectured that it was to have been this house in which the hero and heroine of Thackeray's unfinished novel 'Denis Duval' were to have resided when they married, for among the notes left by its author is one giving a description of a villa at Beckenham which might well be Kent House.

In a 'Morning Post' issue of 1815 the property was advertised as having Common Rights on Penge Common. It was still a farm in 1878 but in more recent years the premises were used as a Nursing Home and as a Private Hotel.

Now, on the site of the ancient building, we have a block of modern residential houses and flats.

The BIRKBECK ESTATE and CHURCHFIELDS area

The road from Penge to Beckenham was, even less than a 100 years ago, a country lane and a Guide Book of 1827 reads - "Beyond Chaffinch's River there is an enticing field-path to Beckenham with arched trees overhanging". Originally known as Penge Road it was not altered to Beckenham Road until about 1900. On either side were fields and meadows, and by the middle of the 19th century cottages and farms began to be established.

There is a description of a piece of land in a will of 1490 which reads - "Upper Cokks, lying betwixt Bakk Lane and the highway that goeth to Croydon". Nothing is known of 'Upper Cokks' but the land (now Churchfields Road) which ran the whole distance from Penge Road to Elmers End Road, has appeared on maps as Bakk, Back's, Baxe's and Beck Lane.

In 1820 there stood on the right hand corner, in Penge Road, a small cottage with a 'neat sporting-box and chaise house'. Borrowman suggests this may well be 'Woodbine Cottage' which disappeared in 1880. A map of 1835 shows a strip of fields in this area stretching to beyond Elmers End, belonging to the Cator Estate.

Farms in this area were ELM FARM, situated between the present railway bridge and Barnmead Road, and THAYERS FARM (1869) of only 41 acres, approached by a track leading from the stables of 'Clock House'. Roads on this side of Beckenham Road, on the Cator Estate, are mostly named after farm fields and features, such as Barnmead (1880s), Thayers Farm (1880s), Chaffinch (1900) and Rowden (1900). In Plawsfield Road, also named after a farm field, there are no houses at all.

A plan dated 1680 shows two areas of Church Lane in Baxe's Lane. One was the plot on which St.Augustine's Church and the present Churchfields School stand, being then known as 'Bellrope Field'. Borrowman here suggests - "this was because the rent was applied in providing Bell Ropes for the Parish Church".

This plot was divided up as follows:-

1. In 1885 part of the field was given to the Local Board to allow the road to be widened.
2. In 1886 another part was used for the erection of a Mission House, served from the Parish Church; this became the St.Augustine's Church.
3. In 1889 the remainder was sold by the Trustees to the Beckenham School Board for £900 for the erection of a school, first called Arthur Road School, and opened in 1890 - later known as Churchfields School. In 1907 the Trustees sold a further piece of land to the School Board for school extensions.

The second plot of Church Land was left to the Beckenham Parish Church Council in the will of Edmund Style, a member of the family who owned Langley from 1510 to 1718. A record of this bequest can still be seen on one of the Tablets in the Parish Church. In 1904 the Church sold this plot to the Local Council for use as a recreation ground, at an annual charge of £37.10.0., insisting that the origin of the land should be perpetuated by calling it 'The Churchfields Recreation Ground', which was opened on 1st August 1907. Shortly after this sale the lower part of the road was renamed Churchfields Road, being previously known as Arthur Road.

At one time there was a Brick Field in this area, with Blandford Road as the top boundary and the whole of Beck Lane (as it then was) as the other. The steep bank formed by excavating the clay for the brick making can still be seen on the Churchfield's sides of Villiers and Arroll Roads.

House development in Arthur Road started in the late 1870s with about 50 houses at the lower end, but the rest of the original houses were not completed until about 1907, with the shops coming later. The new blocks of Council Flats at the lower end are named after Firemen who lost their lives on duty during Air Raids.

The present Beck Lane was not developed for houses until after World War II, being previously used as Allotments. At the far end, on the Elmers End Road corner, stands the London Transport Depot. The former building (1929), which incidentally housed solid-tyre 'buses, was destroyed by a Flying Bomb and when rebuilt (1953) one of the entrances was called 'The Cunningham Gate' in memory of a faithful fire-watcher who remained at his post on the roof, to give warning.

Churchfields Road also had the Beckenham Corporation Depot, the former electric power station and one of Beckenham's largest factories, Small Electric Motors.

About the middle of the 19th century much land in Beckenham was bought by the Birkbeck Freehold Land Society, founded in 1851 by Francis Ravenscroft. He needed a name that would guarantee the integrity of his Society, and chose that of BIRKBECK.

Dr. George Birkbeck, a Yorkshire physician and philanthropist, was a leader in the movement to provide education for the working man. In 1823 he formed the Mechanics Institute out of which grew the present Birkbeck College, part of the London University.

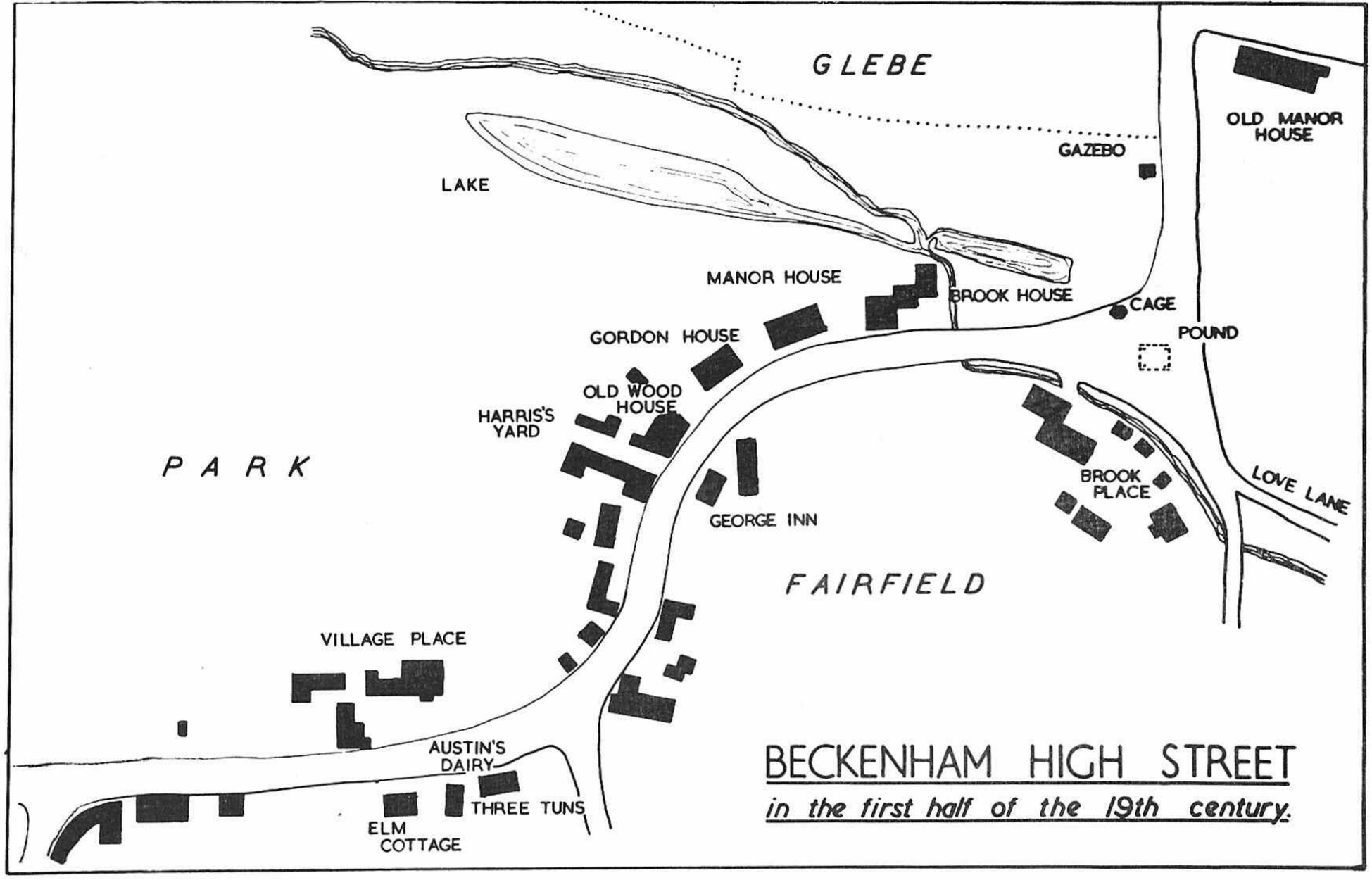
Building developments on the Birkbeck Estate began in the 1870s and many of the roads were named after people who were associated with the Freehold Land Society, such as Sultan Street (1880), formerly Sultan Road; Blandford Road (1898); Blandford Avenue (1900); Arroll Road (1904); Seward Road (1907); Villiers Road (1908); Allen Road (1910), and Clement Road which was not developed until after the first World War.

Kimberley Road (1904-5) was named after a besieged garrison during the Boer War, while Mackenzie Road was named after Col.Colin Mackenzie who, it is said, had his Afghan servant baptised in the Parish Church in 1867.

Sidney Road (1900) was named after Sidney Cottage which stood on the Beckenham Road corner. This was once the parsonage for All Saints Church which stood opposite in Chaffinch Road. Houses in Kendall Road followed those in Sidney Road but Kendall Avenue was not developed until the early 1930s.

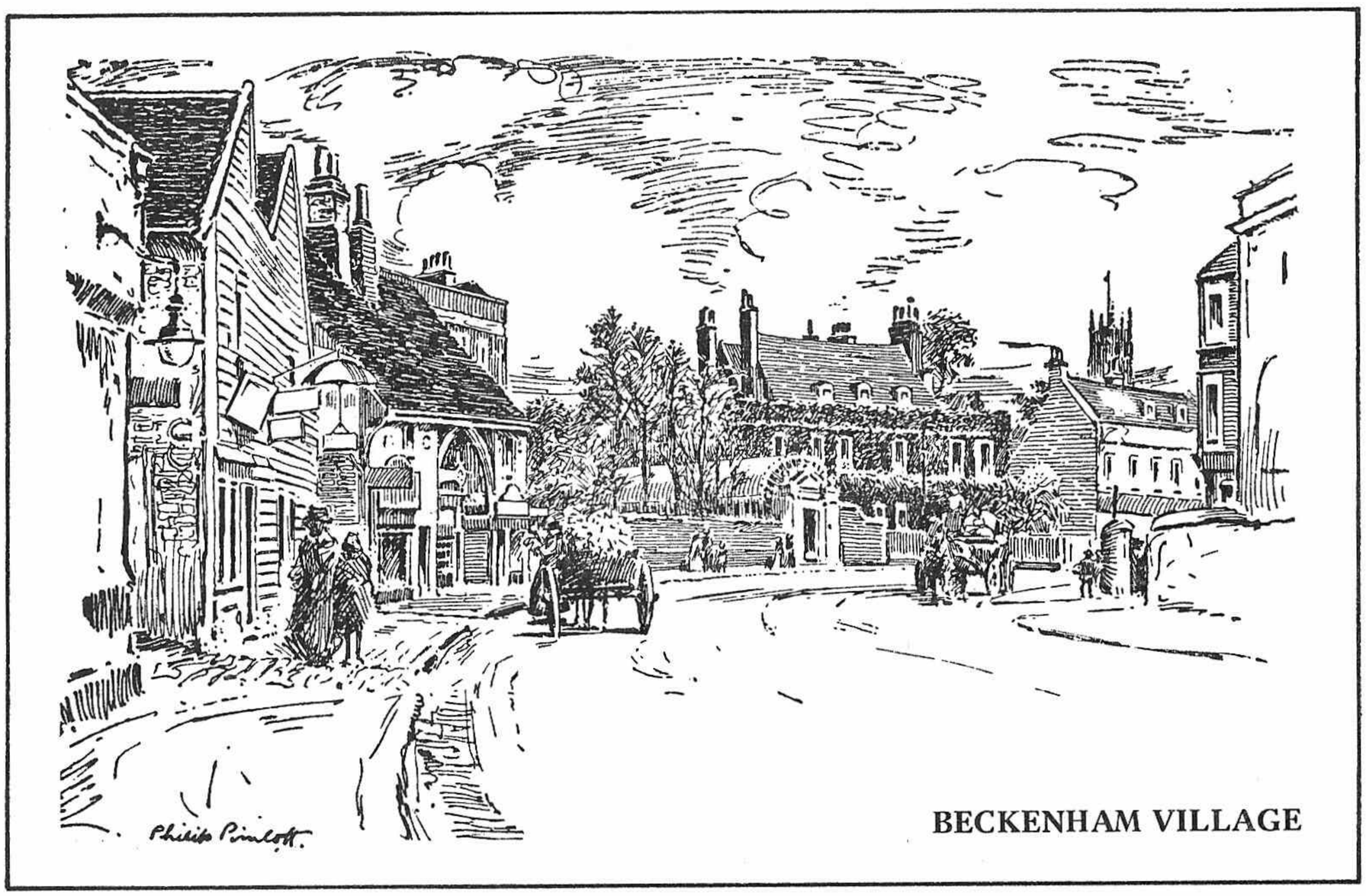
It was originally intended that Avenue Road should extend across the railway into Blandford Road, but presumably the cost would have been too great, so the footbridge was built instead.

The reason why Clement and Seward Roads are the only direct links between Churchfields and Blandford Roads is that they were formed on the only plot of land owned by the Birkbeck Estate which had a frontage to Churchfields Road; land on either side of this plot never formed part of the Estate, which accounts for Sultan Street and Blandford Avenue being cul-de-sac.

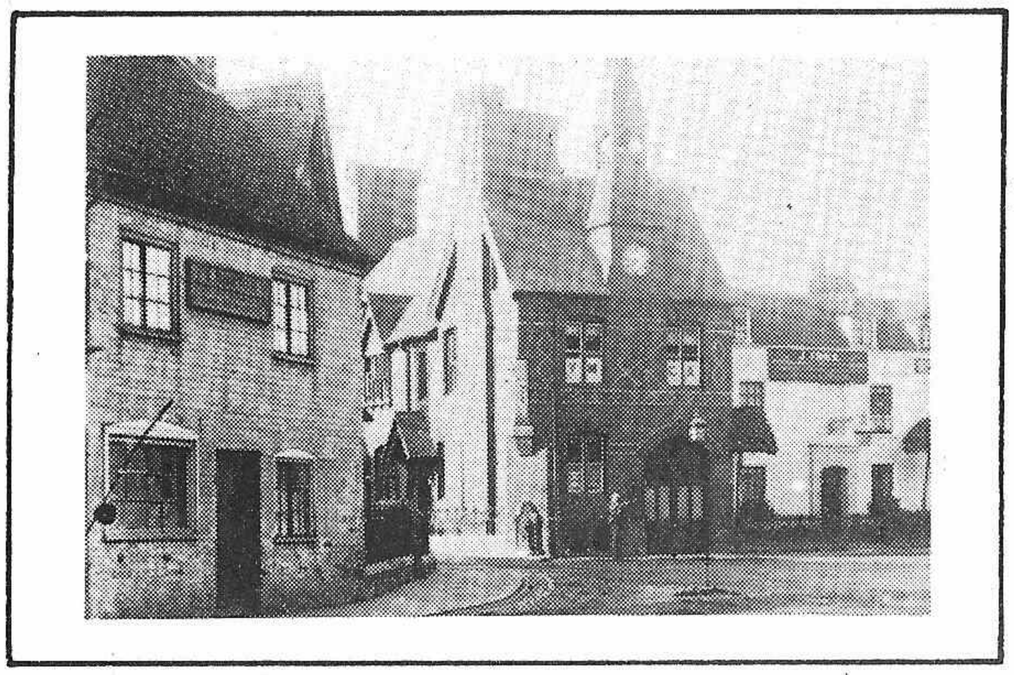


BECKENHAM HIGH STREET

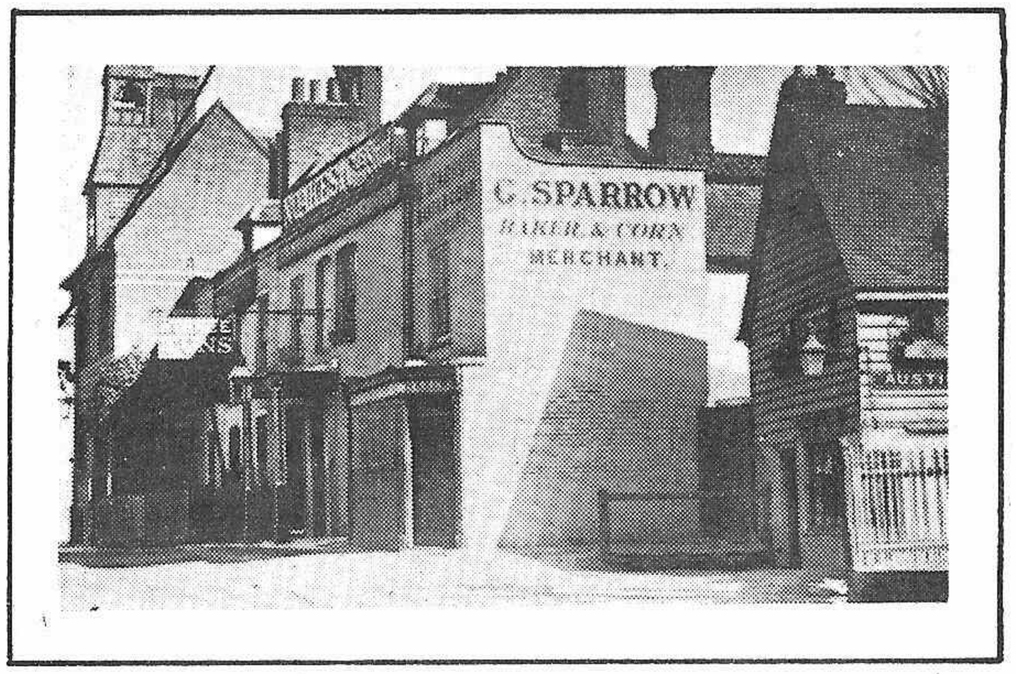
in the first half of the 19th century.



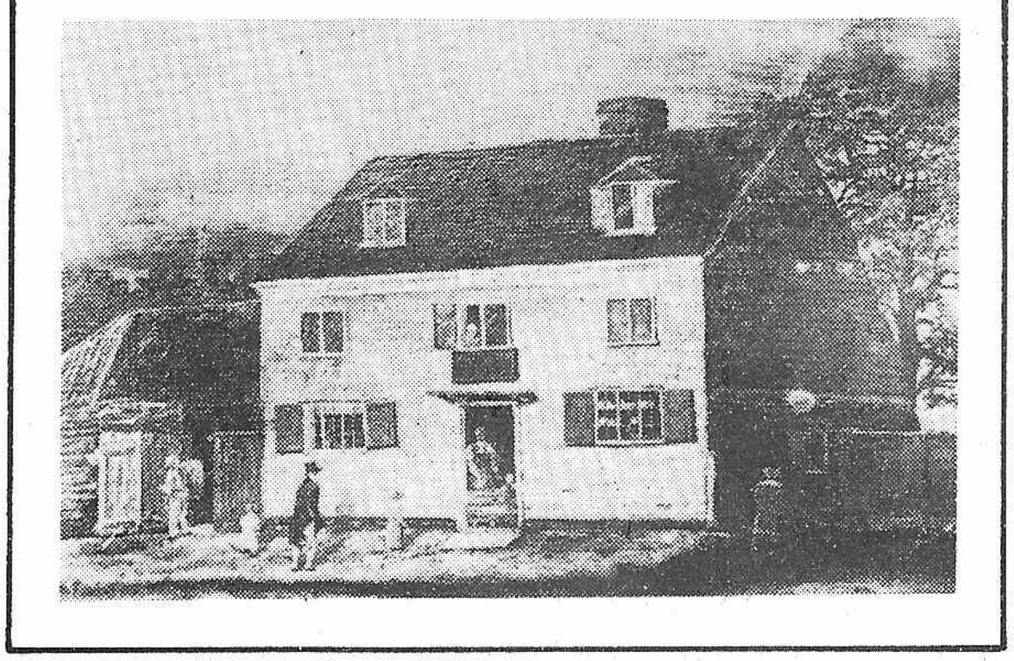
BECKENHAM VILLAGE



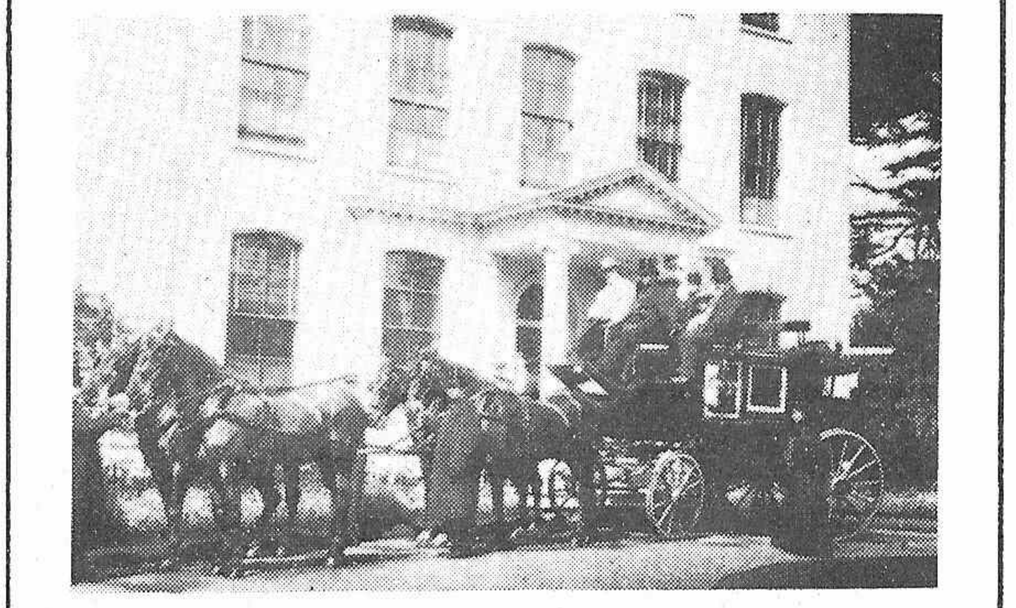
Old Fire Station



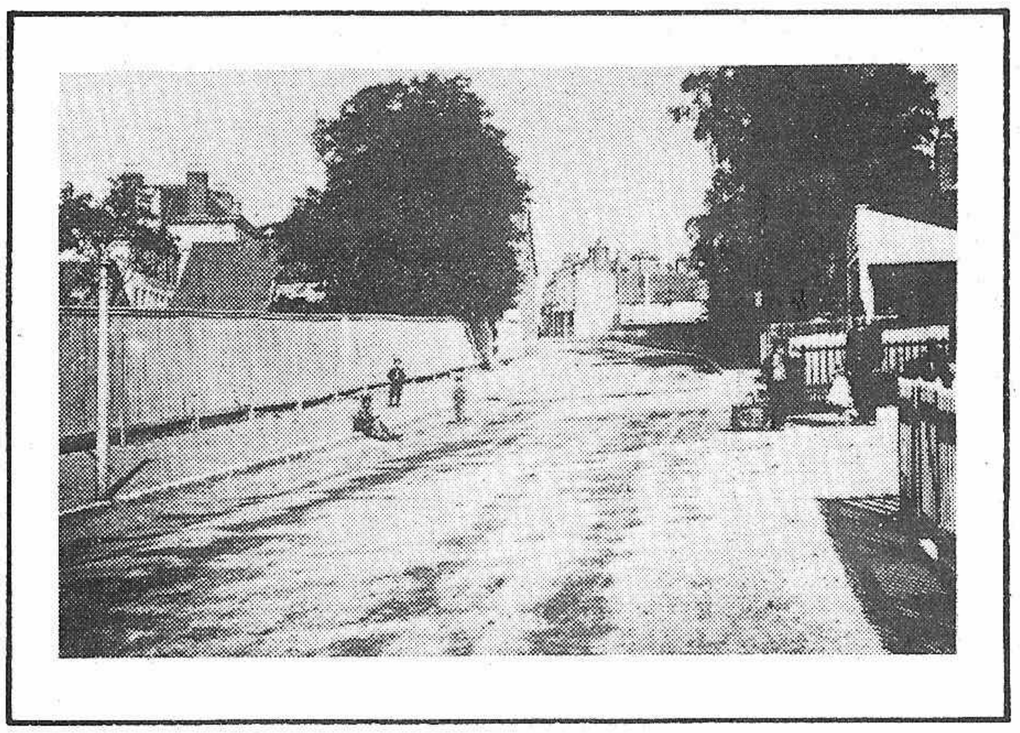
The Three Tuns

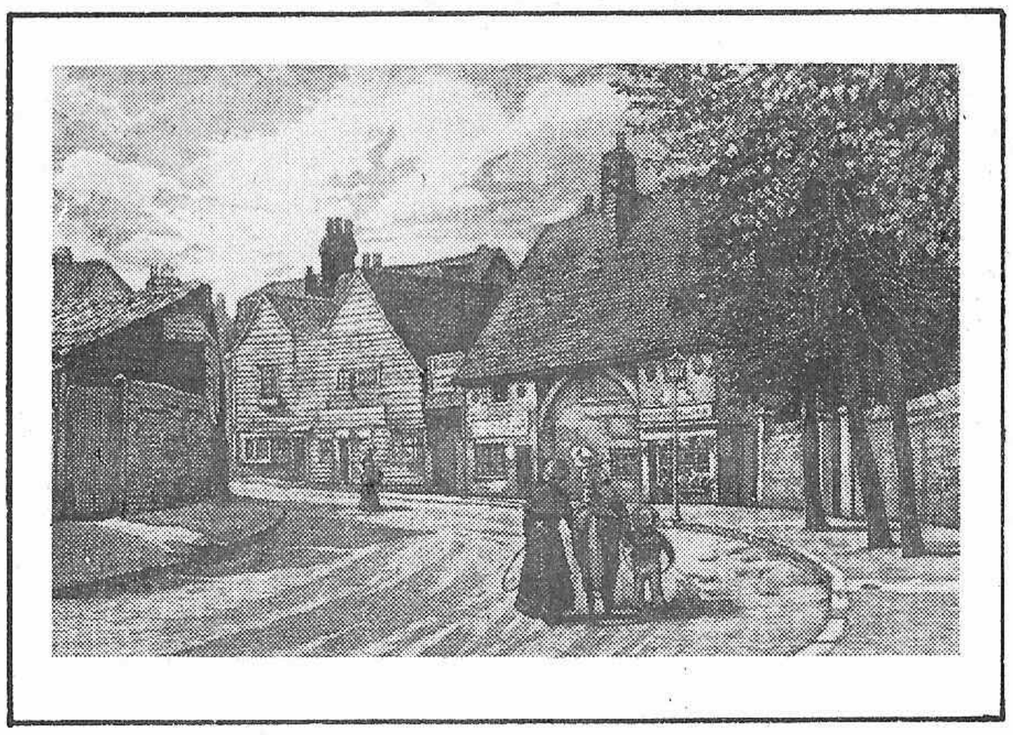


Parish Clerk's House



Squire C. Lea Wilson





SCENES IN THE VILLAGE HIGH STREET

THE VILLAGE HIGH STREET

When we talk of The Village we naturally think of the High Street as the centre of village life, with tradesmen, shops and public houses serving the Manor Houses and Estates and the workers on those estates. The central figure was the Village Squire, the last of whom in Beckenham was Cornelius Lea Wilson, who died at Village Place in December 1911 at the age of 96.

Starting at the lower end of the High Street there were :-

BECKENHAM LODGE which stood at the junction of Croydon and Beckenham Roads. Up to about 1810 it was occupied by the Banyer family, then by Hulbert Wathen who, in 1842, sold to John Woolley. The grounds extended along Beckenham Road as far as Queens Road with the front entrance by Westfield Road, and the estate Baillif's cottage was one of a pair which stood on the present corner of Elm Road, opposite the Baptist Church. In the grounds were some fine Cedar trees which gave the name to Cedars Road when the house was pulled down for road developments.

VILLAGE PLACE, formerly THE CEDARS again because of the Cedar trees in its grounds, was built in the early part of the 18th century by William Davis on the site of a former house. The grounds extended along the back of the High Street as far as Church Hill with the Beck flowing through part. An old map shows parkland extending to Kent House and marked 'Beckenham Park'.

Alderman Richard Lea resided at Village Place, and in 1828 Col. Samuel Wilson, who in 1838 was Lord Mayor of London (see page 22), a J.P. for Kent and Westminster, and Harbinger to the Queen. Later the Lea family intermarried with the Wilsons to give us the Lea-Wilson family connection familiar to many 'Old Villagers'.

The coach of Squire Lea Wilson was a familiar sight in the Village, and on Church Hill there stood a GazeBo , used as a look-out for the coach returning from London, via Lewisham. In 1926 this GazeBo was purchased by Mr.T.W.Thornton and re-erected in his garden off Kelsey Square where it remained until destroyed in the development of Thornton Dene, off Greenways.

Village Place was used as a Military Headquarters during the first World War and was demolished in 1920 when the Rectory Estate was developed, The Drive being on part of the old mansion drive. The parade of shops in the High Street was called Cedars Parade.

ELM COTTAGE stood opposite the entrance to Village Place, and was so called because of a large Elm tree in the grounds, measuring nearly 15 feet in circumference and standing 100 feet high. Tradition says that this building once stood in Wickham Road and was moved brick-by-brick to the new site!

Rev. Andrew Brandram, M.A., Rector of Beckenham from 1838 to 1850, lived there at one time, but later Mr.Legg used the building as stables for the local horse-bus. In 1900 the Cottage was used as a Territorial Headquarters for the Volunteer Corps, from which some men went to the Boer War; and it was also used by the Territorials up to the time of the first war.

AUSTIN'S SHOP was below the Three Tuns, a small shop built in the 17th century as a gardener's cottage for The Cedars opposite. The lower part was of brick and stucco, and the upper part of green oak weatherboarding on timber framing.

Thomas Austin opened the shop in the early 1850s for making and selling pork and beef sausages, and at the rear he kept cows, sheep and chickens. He had a son Charles W.Austin and two daughters who were all born there. Charlie Austin was quite a character of the Village days. For over 60 years he was a bellringer at the Parish Church, and for many years one of his sisters helped him in the shop and with the little farm.

The building was too badly riddled with woodworm to be retained as an historic building and was demolished in February 1959 for the erection of the present Jade Room Restaurant.

THE THREE TUNS is one of the oldest licensed houses in the High Street, and with The George and The Jolly Woodman in Chancery Lane, we may well have three among the very oldest in the Country. In 1820 it had an Assembly Room when the landlord was John Scagell; later the landlord was Mr. Ruston followed by Mr. Ovenden who took over, and ran, the horse-bus previously owned by Mr.Legg.

Next came the Village POLICE STATION which in 1884 was moved to the new building on Church Hill where it still remains. The old site is now the entrance to the Three Tuns car park.

THE OLD FIRE STATION, a red brick building on the corner of Kelsey Square (at one time the main entrance to Kelsey Manor), had a variety of uses. It was the first meeting place of the Rural Sanitary Authority in 1872; then it was the Fire Station with the warning bell in the turret, which bell is now the 'closing time' bell in Kelsey Park; later it was occupied by the Y.M.C.A. and now the lower part is a greengrocer's shop while the rooms over are used as a surveyor's offices. On the corner of the building is one of the old Village Pumps.

Further along, on the same side, almost opposite Woolworth's stood the PARISH CLERK'S HOUSE, which, at the time of demolition about 1927/28 for road widening, was The Hawthorn Laundry.

The exact age of THE GEORGE INN is unknown but there is a reference to Richard King, at the Sign of Ye George, paying Hearth Tax in 1662. In the 'Daily Courant' of May 1715 there appeared:- "A Stage Coach is set up from Beckenham which goes from 'The George' every Monday and Saturday morning, and returns from 'Star Inn', Fish Street, London, the same days, performed by John Hobbs, who lives at 'The George'".

Thomas Cronk, at one time the Parish Beadle, was a landlord there; he died in 1831. The Petty Sessions were regularly held there until the end of the last century. In 1886 there was still in use a Drinking Pot bearing the stamp of William III: J.G. Wheeler then kept the Inn. He was a Member of the first Sanitary Authority in Beckenham and took an active part in introducing gas lighting in Beckenham.

On the other side of the road, where W.H.Smith's bookshop now stands, stood THE OLD WOOD HOUSE. It was a picturesque old building of the Village days and may well have been originally built as a Yeoman's Hall for, although three separate shops in latter years, when pulled down it was discovered that originally it had been one large hall with a central fireplace and only a hole in the roof to let out the smoke.

THE MANOR HOUSE, as it was called, was almost adjoining. This must not be confused with the Old Manor House in Bromley Road, for it never was the seat of the Lord of the Manor. It will be remembered by its fine glass covered-way leading from the street up to the house. The grounds at the back, with an ornamental lake off the Beck, adjoined those of Village Place.

At one time it was the residence of George Grote, father of the historian, after he left Shortlands House. Later it was occupied by Dr.P.J.Curtis and after the first World War was used by the British Legion before being demolished about 1932. Boots' Stores first occupied the old site, but when they moved, the shop was used by 'The House of Bewley' and now is a fruiterer.

THE GREYHOUND, at the foot of Church Hill, was originally a private residence, with the Beck flowing by as an open stream, and may have been once occupied by Peter Burrell. On the bottom of a Lease dated 30th September 1691 by Peter Burrell, of London, to Rowland King, of Beckenham, of certain lands in Beckenham, there is a note - "Mr.Burrell lives over against ye pump in Beckenham" - which was presumably this residence.

Borrowman's map of 1723 also shows that Peter Burrell owned a house on this site. In 1845 it was occupied by the Misses Woodruffe, then by Dr. R.R. Stilwell and later by W.Levens; but about 1870 it became a licensed house when other building developments were going on in the Village. Borrowman says - "the former residence has been modernised so completely as to destroy entirely the character of the building"; while 1962 saw yet another metamorphosis!

Borrowman also recalls that - "in January 1888 Beckenham lost the services of a much respected inhabitant, Dr. R.R.Stilwell, who practised in the Village, and was, in the early '60s, the only Medical Practitioner in Beckenham".

Opposite The Greyhound, at the foot of Church Hill, stood THE POUND, a wooden enclosure for impounding stray cattle at night; THE CAGE, a temporary prison for drunken men, on which was a motto 'Live and Repent' with the date 1787; and nearby THE STOCKS. Replicas of these were made for the Coronation Celebrations in June 1953 when an Old English Fayre was held in the afternoon, using the High Street from the bottom of Church Hill to Village Way.

Next to the Pound was another VILLAGE PUMP, mostly used for drawing water from the Beck for road watering.

The Cage is first mentioned in a Vestry Minute of 1799, and it was demolished in 1856. The Pound which was removed in 1885, is also mentioned in a Vestry Minute as to its special use; but little is known when The Stocks were last used as the only record is by comments in reminiscences from former village inhabitants.

LORD MAYOR'S DAY
Friday, the Ninth of November 1838
The Right Honorable SAMUEL WILSON
LORD MAYOR

Thomas Johnson, Esq: Alderman, } Sheriffs.
Thomas Wood, Esq: Alderman, }

GENERAL BILL OF FARE
GUILDHALL

250 Tureens of Real Turtle, containing 5 pints each
200 Bottles of Sherbert
6 Dishes of Fish
4 Boiled Turkeys & Oysters
60 Roast Pullets
60 Dishes of Fowls
60 Dishes of Capons
50 French Pies
60 Pigeon Pies
53 Hams, ornamented
43 Tongues
2 Barons of Beef
2 Quarters of House-Lamb
3 Rounds of Beef
2 Stewed Rumps of Beef
13 Sirloins, Rumps and Ribs of Beef
60 Dishes of Mashed and other Potatoes
48 Dishes of Lobsters & Prawns
140 Jellies
50 Blancmanges
40 Dishes of Tarts, creamed
30 Dishes of Oranges and other Tourtes
40 Dishes of Almond Pastry
20 Chantilly Baskets
60 Dishes of Mince Pies
56 Salads

THE REMOVES

(i.e. "a dish to be changed while the rest of the course remains on the table")

80 Turkeys
6 Leverets
80 Pheasants
24 Geese
40 Dishes of Partridge
15 Dishes of Wild Fowl
2 Pea Fowls

DESSERT

100 Pine Apples, from 2 to 3 lbs. each
200 Dishes of Hot-House Grapes
250 Ice Creams
75 Plates of Ripsten & other Pippins
75 Dishes of Pears
60 Ornamental Savoy Cakes
75 Plates of Walnuts
80 Plates of dried Fruit & Preserves
50 Plates of Preserved Ginger
60 Plates of Rout Cake and Chips
36 Plates of Brandy Cherries

WINES

CHAMPAIGN - HOCK - CLARET - MADEIRA - PORT - SHERRY

FARMS

One hundred years ago there were no public parks or recreation grounds and, apart from the Manor Houses, there were few other private dwellinghouses. From the Parish Church on the right hand side, going towards Beckenham Place, there was only one road, leading to FOXGROVE FARM which was situated between the present Foxgrove Road and The Avenue, about opposite Foxgrove Avenue, and all lands on that side of Southend Road, extending over the hill to the Ravensbourne, belonged to that farm.

This was a moated farm where the local Volunteer Fire Brigade carried out much of the practice, and The Avenue, when first formed was known as Moat Road. The original Manor (M.O.B. p.7) was pulled down about 1830 and the later buildings about 1878.

On the other side of the road, opposite the Parish Church, there were the Rectory grounds, stables and coach houses; then nothing until COPERS COPE FARM occupied by Michael Mathew, with its garden, barn, pond and granary. The farm fields, comprising about 250 acres, extended across the present New Beckenham area with footpaths linking up with Kent House Farm, and the farm house stood - and still stands - on the corner of Copers Cope Road and Southend Road.

There is considerable guess work about this peculiar name but it is generally accepted that it came from 'Cooper's Copse', although referred to in a Minute of the Parish Council as Koker's Koke.

The Mathews had been farmers in Beckenham for a long time, for in the Churchyard there is a grave with the name Mark Mathew 1700. There is a copy of an Agreement between John Cator and Michael Mathew on page 25. When part of the land towards New Beckenham was bought for railway development Michael Mathew took over Stone Farm, in Wickham Road.

His son Walter was born at Copers Cope Farm on 10th January 1850, christened at the Parish Church by Rev. Andrew Brandram and married some 20 years later by Rev. Frederick Chalmers. He became a Churchwarden at Christ Church, was a partner in the Coal Merchant firm of Moore and Mathews, and died in 1941 at the age of 91. Walter's son, Walter Andrew Mathew, who had Beckenham's first motor garage near The George Inn, left Beckenham in 1910 and died on 13th January 1968, thus terminating the family connection with Old Beckenham.

STONE FARM was situated on the right hand side of Wickham Road, opposite Hayes Lane, the buildings only being pulled down when the Parklangley shops and Stone Park Avenue were developed. A footpath through the farm ran over the hill to Eden Farm, (M.O.B. p.13).

KELSEY PARK FARM, a dairy farm, was almost adjoining in Wickham Road, and the last of the old buildings were only recently demolished for the erection of Park Farm Court.

KELSEY FARM (also known as Kelsey Cottage) in old Kelsey Lane, built in 1832 by John Woolley, was 6 years later the residence of Herbert Jenner. It stood on the present site of Uplands and part of Forest Ridge, and in 1875, according to a local directory, was occupied by Alexander Strickland. It was a large house and farm with a chapel, the entrance being opposite Sandhills School, with a lodge, still in existence although altered and enlarged; this was occupied by Mark Webster,head gardener to Mr. Preston, who recalled that when Selfridges Store was first opened in London some cotton plants were sent to him and when developed, these plants were used for window display in the Oxford Street store. The main house was lighted by electricity generated by a gas engine, long before electricity was introduced locally.

NEW FARM, situated in Croydon Road, Elmers End almost facing Elmer Lodge, was occupied in 1820 by Robert Brown and subsequently by Peter Paget. As late as 1849 steeplechasing was run from this farm across fields to Sidney Cottage, on the corner of Sidney Road at Clock House. In more recent years this picturesque cottage was the home of the Hazelton family, from about 1906, until demolished for the erection of the Odeon cinema (now demolished) and the adjoining shops about 1938/39.

To complete the overall picture of farms in and around the Village three others were dealt with more fully in "The Manors of Old Beckenham" namely Langley (p.10), Eden Farm (p.13) and Eden Park Farm (p.15). Other farms referred to elsewhere in this edition were:- Kent House Farm, Thayers Farm and Elm Farm.

Extracts from an AGREEMENT to lease COPERS COPE FARM

MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT made this third day of March 1851 between JOHN CATOR of Beckenham Place, Kent, Esquire (by Peter Cator as his Agent) of the one part and MICHAEL MATHEW of the Parish of Beckenham aforesaid in Kent, Farmer of the other part the said John Cator agrees to let unto the said Michael Mathew

ALL that Farm and Lands called COPERS COPE FARM situated in the Parish of Beckenham in the County of Kent ... (reserving to the said John Cator all Timber, Timber-like Trees and other Trees and Saplings and all pollards (except the tops thereof) and Fruit Trees (except the Fruit thereof) and also except and reserving all Game Rabbits Fish and Wild Fowl (to the exclusion of the Tenant) with liberty of the said John Cator and his friends and Servants to enter for the purpose of sporting and also excepting all Mines Quarries and Manorial Rights) ...

TO HOLD the same as Tenant from year to year at the yearly rent of £538 when the average price of a quarter of Wheat and a quarter of Barley shall in such year amount to 88/-, and such Rent to be increased £1 per cent for every shilling that the average price for a quarter of Wheat and a quarter of Barley shall exceed 88/- and such Rent to decrease £1 per cent for every shilling that the average shall be less than 88/-, such Rent to be paid half yearly...

TO PROVIDE sufficient Wheat Straw for thatching ... to cultivate the lands according to the most improved system of husbandry in the County of Kent ...

ALSO to imbarn and stack all the Corn and Hay in the Barn and Rick Yards and not elsewhere and there thrash out same and carry the straw and stover into the farm yards and the same to be there foddered with Cattle (except the straw required for thatching and the hay and straw of the last year) the Tenant being at liberty to sell the Hay and Straw (except in the last year) on condition of rendering an account thereof and of the dung purchased and bringing back in lieu of every load of 36 trusses so sold a Wagon load of good rotten dung and the same with other dung made upon the premises to be spread where most needed ...

TO DRILL in the corn and twice at least in every season to hoe between the drills and handweed the same once during the summer ... also not to take two crops of the same kind of corn in succession from the same land and if two crops of corn of different kinds are taken off the same land in succession the Tenant will dress such lands with good rotten dung at the rate of 15 cart loads per acre...

NOT TO MOW the meadow land more than once a year ... to furnish the Landlord with a list of the arable lands with a statement of cropping made up to Michaelmas in each year and in the last year of the Tenancy to sow at the request of the Landlord clover or other Grass Seeds on a fourth of the arable land such seeds to be supplied by the Landlord and to be harrowed and rolled in by the Tenant being paid 1/6d. an acre for the same ...

At the end of the Tenancy to leave the hay straw haulm and dung then on the premises for the benefit of the Landlord or Incoming Tenant on being paid for the same at the market price to be settled by two Referees or their Umpires if the parties differ therein between themselves ...

NOT TO SOW mustard or other exhausting or unusual seed unless fed off in a green state under penalty of £100 per acre ...

NOT TO break up or raise any clay loam sand gravel or soil for making bricks or tiles or for Sale of otherwise under the penalty of £50 per load ...

NOT TO PLOUGH or break up any of the meadow or pasture land under the penalty of £50 per acre ... not to commit any waste or damage to the premises ... not to shoot or sport in any way upon the premises or permit others to do so or to disturb the Game Rabbits or Wild Fowl there being or destroy the Eggs or the young thereof ...

NOT TO KEEP any sporting dog upon the premises and to warn off Trespassers after Game by Notice in writing or permit the Landlord to use his name in such Notice and to give the Landlord notice in writing of the offenders with power for the Landlord to use the name of him the Tenant in any action or suit against such Offenders ...

AND THE LANDLORD AGREES to allow the Tenant Gravel out of the Gravel Pits for the repair of the Roads and Farm Yard on the premises as much gravel as may be required for these purposes at the rate of 6d. per cubic yard.

TO PAY for all mischief and damage done by Rabbits or by any overstock of Game ...

RIVERS and STREAMS

With the ever-increasing development of roads and new estates, the meandering Village streams are inevitably being diverted and culverted, so before they completely disappear from view, I thought it advisable to include these notes, when reflecting on the days of the old Village, and gratefully acknowledge the helpful information afforded to me by the Civil Engineering Department at the Town Hall.

There are three main rivers running through Beckenham; the BECK through the centre, the RAVENSBOURNE to the east along the boundary with Bromley, and the CHAFFINCH towards the west by the Penge boundary, each with associated tributaries.

The BECK, which is now thought to have got its name by what is called back-information, that is, from the name of the village of Beckenham, rises near the Springpark Woods at West Wickham; it then flows by the bottom of gardens in Copse Avenue, via Bolderswood Way and The Alders to the White Hart Pond.

From that pond the river flows by gardens in Chamberlain Crescent, then the Oak Lodge estate, Monks Orchard Road, crosses South Eden Park Road, near the Monks Orchard roundabout, under the railway line, emerging near the entrance to the Langley Schools. Passing across the grounds of the Wellcome Research Laboratories at Langley Court, where the Parklangley branch joins, the Beck passes under the South Eden Park Road near the exit gate from Langley Court, through the Eden Lodge estate into Kelsey Park, and thence out by the main gates, under the road to the back of the odd-numbered houses in Kelsey Park Road.

In the late 1880s the stream was culverted under the High Street in front of the present Telephone Exchange and Greyhound buildings, under the left hand side of Dunn's shop, through the woodland at the rear of gardens in Church Avenue and The Drive, across Rectory Road, alongside Woodbrook (at one time a private residence named Broadwater), under the railway bridge in Blakeney Road (the scene of the railway disaster in 1866) and finally across Kings Hall Road into Cator Park, where it flows into the Chaffinch.

The Parklangley branch rises near Goodhart Way and flows through the Parklangley Golf Course where a lake still exists. A hundred years ago a moat existed around Foxgrove Farm. The outlet flowed under the Avenue, Albemarle Road, The Knoll and Manor Road to feed the ornamental lake at the rear of the Old Manor House in Bromley Road, The only remaining open part of this stream is through the garden of No.10, The knoll and at the rear of Nos. 2.4 & 6; the remainder is now a culverted surface water sewer.

The CHAFFINCH - shown on some old maps as the Chaffle - also rises at Shirley, near The Glade, Bywood and Chaffinch Avenues, flowing down towards Elmers End, crossing the Croydon and Elmers End Roads near St. Margaret's Road, then on between the back gardens of Clock House and Forster Roads, crosses Cromwell and Cedars Roads to the back of the Clock House Methodist Church, under Beckenham Road to the east side of the railway where it was still visible until culverted for the building of the office block, Bourne House. Also, until recently culverted, the stream was visible passing under Chaffinch Road, through the allotments and across Kings Hall Road into Cator Park, and on as the Pool River to Catford Bridge.

A small tributary of the Chaffinch, entering just north of the Beck junction in Cator Park, is the Penge Stream, which flows from a point near Kent House Road, crossing Barnmead, Kings Hall, Reddons and Aldersmead Roads. Originally this stream collected the rain water outfall from the Penge and Anerley fields, and is now almost entirely culverted. Flowing into this stream was what is locally called the Boundary Culvert (shown on some maps as the Poo River), entering the Beckenham area across the Elmers End Road, and then between Oak Grove and Ravenscroft Road, on to Kent House Road.

A larger tributary is the St. James's Stream. This flows down from the Fish Ponds on the Monks Orchard estate to the Upper Elmers End Road, where it was once visible opposite the Rising Sun, thence parallel with the Upper Elmers End Road to St.James's Avenue, then across Forster Road to join the Chaffinch.

The stream entering the Beckenham area from South Norwood, carrying the effluent discharge from the Croydon sewerage, can hardly be called a stream in the generally accepted way, but for record this passed along Beck Way LANE and discharged into the Chaffinch near Cromwell Road.

The RAVENSBOURNE rises in Holwood Park, Keston, a short distance from the outer ditch of the Roman Encampment, on the north west side, at what is known as Caesar's Well, which in 1807 was formed into a bath. This river then flows through Bromley to Shortlands where it divides the former boundaries of Bromley and Beckenham.

From Ravensbourne Avenue, Shortlands, it flows round the north of Beckenham Place Park, forms the Southend Pond (Peter Pan's Pool) and thence on to Catford Bridge where, at Perry Farm, it joins the Pool River, the joint river of the Chaffinch and the Beck from Cator Park.

Then from Catford Bridge the Ravensbourne flows through Ladywell Park, and finally discharges into the Thames at Deptford Creek, opposite the Isle of Dogs.

Dr. Johnson wrote of the Ravensbourne:-

"But oh! how changes with changing years
'Tis now the vilest stream on earth,
Polluted from its place of birth;
The Kent and Surrey hills, no more
Can show their limpid rills of yore."

And of the Chaffinch at Clock House, a writer in 'Table Talk' (c.1826) wrote :-

"Ancient Charity let flow this brook
Across the road, for sheep and begger men
To cool their weary feet and slake their thirst."

RAILWAYS IN BECKENHAM

Within the former Borough of Beckenham there were twelve railway stations. On the main line from Victoria there are Penge East, Kent House, Beckenham Junction and Shortlands; on the Catford Loop line Ravensbourne; on the Mid-Kent line Lower Sydenham, New Beckenham, Clock House, Elmers End, Eden Park and West Wickham; and on the Crystal Palace line Birkbeck. Ironically 'Beckenham Hill', near Southend, is not within the Borough area.

The development of local railways is most interesting, and friction and competition between rival companies was acute. Walter Mathew, son of the farmer Michael Mathew of Copers Cope Farm, wrote a very interesting letter to Alderman John Bennett about the railways in Beckenham and I cannot do better than reproduce the text of that letter with a few - very few - corrections and additions.

The first railway, he wrote, was the Mid-Kent line opened on 1st January 1857, a junction being made with the North Kent line at Lewisham. Beckenham was a terminus, the turntable being near where the bridge is now; the roof over the line was painted red, white and blue. Soon after this line was opened a coach ran from, and returned to, Sevenoaks; also Sir John Lubbock and his sons used Beckenham Station morning and evening, coming from 'High Elms' in his carriage with a postillion, en route for the City.

About a year later a railway company called the West London and Crystal Palace Company made the line on to Shortlands, at first named 'Bromley', which was opened in 1858 by a service from there to the Crystal Palace calling at Beckenham; the first train was greeted by a peal of cannon from Martin's Hill, Bromley.

Where the Birkbeck line crosses Beckenham Road, between Blandford and Mackenzie Roads, there was a small station known as 'Beckenham Road, or Birkbeck Halt', built in 1858. Mr. Mathews went on "In connection with this I must tell you who was the first, and I might say only passenger to use this station; he was not an Englishman, but in those far off days a German, viz: Julius Kressmann (who lived in the High Street near where is now Sainsbury's shop): he afterwards became Chairman of the first Beckenham School Board by reason of his knowledge of 'Kultur', I suppose! Now to return to the Railways".